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Title : Summer to Autumn Increases in Maternal Investment for Individual Steller Sea Lions (Eumetopias jubatus) in the Northern Gulf of Alaska

Category : Behavior

Student : M.A./M.S.

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Abstract : We examined maternal behavior in Steller sea lions at Chiswell Island, a small rookery in the Northern Gulf of Alaska. Observations were conducted from 15 May through 1 November 2002, with a mean pupping date of 10 June. Foraging trip durations were significantly longer during the fall than summer months. Comparing the same ten females from summer to fall, trip duration increased from 11.3 h to 51.2 h ($t = 7.35$, $P < 0.001$). Time spent on shore between foraging trips also increased from 19.5 h to 32.4 h ($t = 5.21$, $P < 0.001$). Attendance patterns shifted from a greater percentage of time spent on shore than out at sea foraging during the summer (average 60%/40%) to the opposite pattern during the fall (average 40%/60%). Trip durations appeared to peak by late September and there were no significant changes in attendance patterns as the fall season progressed. Females also nursed their pups for a greater proportion of their total activity budget during the fall compared to summer (8.5% vs. 3.0%; $t = 3.11$, $P = 0.001$). This study illustrates a dramatic change in the behavior of individual lactating sea lions from summer to fall as they shift into active gestation, as the energy demands of their pups increase, and as they forage on prey that is likely more scarce.